

THE GUARDIAN'S SHORT STORY

Silas of Hebron Valley

By M. J. PHILLIPS

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John G. Davidson, with his cleanly shaven, comely face, cleft chin, blue eyes and firm jaw, might have been, from appearance, an actor. He might have been mistaken for a popular preacher or a professional baseball player. His age was, apparently, anywhere between thirty and fifty years.

He had the air of good living and prosperity which the man of the world is supposed to wear. All guesses as to his profession, however, would probably have gone wide of the mark. He was senior member of the firm of Davidson & Cole of Wall street, a firm which bore a rather shady reputation. Even now he was hurrying home from a hunting trip in Maine, which had been cut short by the tip, irregularly received, of a big "killing" to be made the next day on the Stock Exchange.

In other words, Davidson & Cole were preparing to garner several hundred thousand dollars because the Hillmans and the Silvers were about to close in a death grapple for the control of the New York and Western. Each faction held about one-third of the stock. Speculators and investors held the other third, mostly in small blocks. The Silvers needed the road, it was said, to stifle its chances of becoming a dangerous competitor. The Hillman crowd desired it for these very possibilities.

The stock was down to 37; but, according to the information gleaned by the brokers, the Silvers were prepared to pay 150 if necessary for the shares constituting the balance of power.

Despite the suspicion which attached to him on Wall street, Davidson's face was one people instinctively liked and trusted. When, at a remote junction point, Silas Ashlar entered the smoker of the train, shaking the snowflakes from his ulster—it was midwinter and storming—he took the seat beside the broker.

Ashlar was twenty-five, and his good natured face, unchiseled by the stress of city life, was round and immature, yet withal there was native shrewdness in it and frank honesty.

Davidson was a man to inspire not only confidence, but confidences. Besides, he was in the mood for conversation. In the course of half an hour the country youth was unbending himself to this agreeable stranger as he had never talked to his closest friend. "I live over to Hebron Valley, in Vermont," he said. "I'm clerk in old man Briggs' general store; been working there since I was fourteen. The old man wants to retire now, and I'd like to buy the business."

"I see," rejoined Davidson politely. Silas beat a tattoo with clumsy fingers on the window sill and smiled with embarrassment before he proceeded. "There's—there's a girl, you know."

"Indeed, Briggs' daughter, I suppose?" "No; Jennie Gardner. We're—we're engaged, you see. That's why I want the store."

"Feel as if you'd ought to be set up in business before you marry, eh?" queried the broker, smiling a little. "Well, no; I don't," replied the young man reluctantly, "and Jennie don't; neither does her ma. But her father—her's John Gardner, the banker there at Hebron—he don't like me; thinks I ain't got money enough, I guess. Then there's another fellow, the postmaster. He wants Jennie to marry."

Davidson's interest quickened. "Why don't you run away with the girl?" he asked. "She won't do it. She's afraid of her father. She is her mother, for that matter. He's a hard man."

"He'd be satisfied to let you marry if you owned the store?" "Yes, and that's just some more of his meanness," returned Silas. "He thinks it's impossible for me to buy it or he wouldn't say so. All I got's \$500. Briggs wants \$2,000. I'm goin' down to New York to see if I can't raise it. I've heard of money being made pretty quick on Wall street."

"They'd get your hay in about twenty minutes on Wall street," responded Davidson decisively. "I know, because that's where I hang out. But see here, Ashlar, I've got a little sporting blood in my veins, and I've been under dog myself. Suppose I help you down this tu' penny banker?"

"Very well. Let's have your five hundred. There's something on for tomorrow, and maybe I can clean up your little pile for you during the excitement. Are you willing to trust me and take the chance?"

Ashlar's answer was to draw, with trembling fingers, a bulky envelope from an inner pocket and pass it over to the broker, who tore it open and counted the contents dexterously. There was \$500 in the package in well-thumbed tens and twenties.

The broker stowed the money away and produced a bit of pasteboard. "There's my address," he said, handing the card to Ashlar. "You come to that number day after tomorrow at 10, and I'll have some news for you."

When at dusk Ashlar, bewildered by the appalling noise and confusion of the big city, ventured from the railway station into the street he suddenly felt that he had done a foolish thing in intrusting all his money to a perfect stranger, but the remembrance of Davidson's face with its undefinable attraction reassured him. "I was a darn fool for ever thinkin' of this thing," he muttered. "They'd surely

beat me if I tried speculatin' by myself. I guess Davidson is square."

The New York and Western episode on the Stock Exchange next day was merely a skirmish in the great industrial warfare which goes on continuously in that silt in the granite called Wall street. A few profits; scores were ruined. Before Davidson & Cole had loaded up irretrievably with the stock Davidson smelled danger and had begun to let go.

His suspicions proved justified. The story of the fight for control was a clever fake, which had already caught many small firms. It developed that the Silvers and the Hillmans had long since come to an amicable agreement in regard to the road.

"Then we're out about \$65,000," said Lucius Cole the morning after the skirmish as he sat with his partner in their private office.

"About \$65,000," agreed Davidson, "and if I hadn't got wise until a half hour later we'd have been down and out today."

A clerk ushered in Silas Ashlar. The country youth was haggard with anxiety. "The morning paper says we were hit hard," he began. "My money—"

"Your money's all right," interrupted Davidson. "I had your little old \$2,000 sold before the balloon ascension. Here's your check." He handed Ashlar a slip of paper.

Silas for a few moments was dazed by the good news. Then he began to stammer his thanks, but Davidson waved them aside. "Not a word, now, Silas. I want just two promises of you—that you'll never monkey with the Stock Exchange again and that you will go home and get up a wedding within two weeks. Do you agree?"

There were tears in the young man's eyes. "If Jennie says the word we'll be married inside of twenty-four hours. This money shuts her father up. I don't want any more Stock Exchange business either, you bet. I've been too worried the last two days. God bless you, Mr. Davidson. If you ever come to Hebron Valley I'll try to show how much you've done for us."

A dark flush mounted Cole's thick neck and overspread his face as the grateful Ashlar left the office. "Are you crazy, Davidson?" he demanded angrily. "What the devil did you give that money for? The fool heaped wealth have believed anything you told him. Although meant as a sarcasm, a note of anxiety crept into his high, excited voice at the next question, "You ain't turning honest, are you?"

There was more bitterness than humor in Davidson's smile as he replied: "It's a little late in the day for that, isn't it? But I'll tell you why I did it, if you want to know. Did you ever stop to think why I wasn't married?"

"Oh, a girl away back, probably." "Dead right, Lucius. Her folks thought I didn't have money enough, so they sold her off to a tight fisted grubber with a few hundred dollars and a heart like a hickory nut. It's her daughter Ashlar wants to marry. Her husband doesn't like him, and he put the same stumbling block up to the boy that was laid in my path—money."

"Well, I ain't kickin', am I?" snarled Cole, with a change of front which would have puzzled any one but his partner.

"You're senior member of this firm, and you can make an ass of yourself if you want to. But while I was about it I'd have got the boy more than a measly two thousand!"

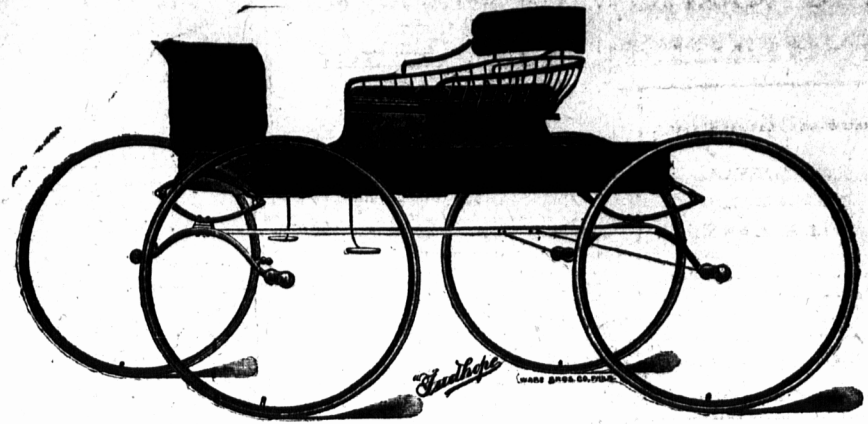
Herbert Spencer's Painted Carpet.

Herbert Spencer once had a carpet which began to fade when it had only been down a few months. It consisted, or, rather, had consisted, of clusters of blue flowers on a drabish ground. Now, with the principal color gone, it had become far too dull for the taste of that lover of brightness. He therefore conceived the unique idea of having each flower stamped over with red ink. For this purpose he invented a small tin tray, which was made so that it stood quite flat on the floor to prevent any possibility of the ink being spilled or dropped about. Bent in it were little wells about as large round and twice as thick as a halfpenny. These depressions were filled with the liquid. The sempstress—whom he was always glad of an excuse to employ because she was so hardworking and so poor—was soon set to carry out his plan. Down on her knees she had to go, and as she was decidedly stout it was no light task. With a cork cut the exact size and dipped in ink she pressed firmly down on each flower, thus leaving it as if covered with red cherries. No wonder it took her over a week, working all day, for the carpet was from twenty-five to thirty feet long and proportionately wide.—Esper's Magazine.

One of the Vagaries of Memory.

A child of American parents was born in Spain, and, although the language of the family was English, she learned to speak Spanish fluently. She then removed to America and went into a boarding school where French was the only language spoken. Of course, hearing no Spanish, the child gradually seemed to forget it. Her knowledge of French was perfect, and that she used as well as English. When she became an elderly lady her health failed her, and she sank into a condition of physical and mental weakness. After a time her attendants observed that she seemed not to understand anything that was spoken in English, but conversed in French with ease. At last she lapsed into a long interval of semiconsciousness, during which she understood nothing. During the last days of her life she suddenly rallied, and her command of Spanish came back to her, so that she talked fluently in it and thoroughly understood it. As a case of mental lapse and peculiarity of memory this is considered quite worthy of note.

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For the above, tickets will be issued to date on the Intercolonial Railway on June 30th, 30th and July 2nd, 1906, good to return on July 3rd, 1906, at first-class one way local fare or the round trip. On July 2nd, tickets will be issued from Charlottetown to Pictou and from Summerside to Point du Chene, good to return same day for one dollar for the round trip. This will be a splendid opportunity for excursionists to take an outing on the new steamer "Empress" leaving 8:30 a.m. for P. du Chene on arrival of morning train from all stations of P. E. I. R. G. W. WAKEFORD, Manager.

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